

### EDITORIAL

## Tourism in ASEAN: A Catalyst for Regional Integration

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### Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a potent force in shaping the landscape of global economies, and nowhere is this more evident than in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Comprising ten diverse nations, ASEAN has harnessed the power of tourism as a driving force for regional integration, fostering economic growth, cultural exchange, and sustainable development. Tourism serves as a powerful engine propelling ASEAN's economic growth forward (Musthofa et al., 2023). The seamless flow of tourists between ASEAN member states has significantly contributed to the region's prosperity, as a robust tourism industry can generate employment opportunities, stimulates local businesses, and supports livelihoods, especially in rural areas. As nations share their cultural, historical, and natural wonders, tourists explore a rich tapestry that transcends borders and fosters understanding.

However, we also identify the downside of massive tourism expansion in the region, including on natural ecosystem, local safety, and preservation of local culture and identity.

The implementation of ASEAN's Open Skies policy has played a pivotal role in boosting tourism in the region (Permana et al., 2020). Facilitating policies on air travel and enhancing connectivity between member states have not only eased travel for tourists but also paved the way for increased trade and investment. As airlines expand their networks, economies are interconnected, amplifying the potential for mutual growth within the region. Further, ASEAN's commitment to sustainable tourism underscores its dedication to responsible growth. By prioritizing sustainable practices, member states work collectively to preserve their natural heritage and protect their unique ecosystems. Intra-ASEAN travel holds immense potential in promoting regional integration and socio-economic growth (Fardhiyanti & Wee, 2022). With the ongoing efforts to streamline visa regulations and facilitate cross-border travel, exploring neighbouring countries has never been more accessible and appealing. Intra-ASEAN travel provides an opportunity for citizens to reconnect with shared histories, promote cultural exchange, and strengthen regional bonds.

With ASEAN cultural diversity, tourism industry transcends the connection between people and break down barriers between communities. From eco-tourism initiatives to local food experiences, ASEAN nations embrace tourism as a vehicle to promote conservation and sustainable development. Through collaboration and sharing of best practices, ASEAN member states amplify their impact, tackling common challenges such as cultural and spiritual diversity, climate change, wildlife protection, and responsible resource management. These collective efforts towards sustainability not only benefit the environment but also enhance the overall appeal of ASEAN as an eco-conscious and socially responsible destination. Moreover, Southeast Asian region is a vibrant drapery of multicultural communities, histories, and traditions, making it a melting pot of unique experiences for travellers worldwide. Beyond its breathtaking landscapes and vibrant cityscapes, ASEAN nations have long recognized the immense value of their rich cultural heritage in shaping their identity. ASEAN celebrates the cultural underpinning and delves into the significance of intra-ASEAN travel, promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of the region's cultural identity.

In line with the above, beyond its cultural diversity, ASEAN boasts a captivating identity, a drapery of colours that reflects the essence of the region. The cultural representation encapsulates the spirit of collaboration and cooperation that has been the cornerstone of ASEAN's growth. Moreover, the region's rich diverse cultural, extensive biodiversity, immerse hospitalities, and picturesque landscapes lend themselves to world-class tourism standards. Despite the expansion of tourism industries in the region with the international standard, each government also extend the scope into more unique approaches to promote more sustainable tourism in line with its national identify and culture.

Another issue that is, to some extent, being overlooked is the notion of halal tourism. Halal tourism has become increasingly important sector growing in Southeast Asia. Such growing halal tourism cannot be separated from the growing Islam both as political and social

powers in many Muslim countries including Indonesia and Malaysia (Saat, 2023; Saefullah, 2022). Such rise of burgeoning pietistic social activism presents both challenges and opportunities to Islamic political actors, and that failure to engage with these new forces will lead to further marginalisation and the risk of declining relevance (Fealy, 2022). Such activism has also, to some extent, increased the halal tourism industry in Southeast Asia.

One step further, halal tourism has emerged as a rapidly growing segment of the global travel industry, and ASEAN is well-positioned to leverage its potential (Mustofa, et. al, 2023). With a significant Muslim population and a diverse range of culturally rich destinations, ASEAN can capitalize on halal tourism to drive inclusive and sustainable economic growth. To do so, ASEAN needs to have proper political economy strategies in setting the agenda of halal tourism in Southeast Asia. This agenda setting should be able to outline key priorities and strategies to promote halal tourism in ASEAN, foster cultural exchange, enhance economic opportunities, and preserve the region's unique identity. Therefore, several aspects of expanding halal tourism have also been identified to foster ASEAN cultural identity.

First, ASEAN must prioritize the development of halal-certified infrastructure across member states. This includes halal restaurants, prayer facilities, and accommodation options that cater to the needs of Muslim travellers. Collaborative efforts among member states can establish standardized halal certification processes to build trust and confidence among Muslim tourists. Second, effective marketing and promotion are essential to position ASEAN as a premier halal-friendly destination. ASEAN can create a cohesive and compelling marketing campaign that highlights the region's diverse cultural offerings, natural beauty, and halal-certified services. Digital platforms and social media can play a significant role in reaching out to potential Muslim travellers worldwide. Third, Engaging the private sector is crucial for the success of halal tourism in ASEAN. Governments can foster partnerships with local businesses, travel agencies, and hospitality providers to expand halal tourism offerings. Incentives for private enterprises to obtain halal certification and implement sustainable practices will further strengthen the sector's growth. Fourth, improving transportation and connectivity within and between ASEAN member states is vital to facilitating halal tourism. ASEAN should invest in modernizing transportation networks, airports, and border crossings to ensure seamless travel experiences for Muslim tourists. Enhanced connectivity will also promote intra-ASEAN travel, encouraging tourists to explore multiple member countries.

Fifth, halal tourism provides an excellent opportunity for cultural exchange between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. ASEAN can organize cultural events, festivals, and workshops that promote understanding and appreciation of diverse traditions and practices. Such initiatives foster mutual respect, breaking down stereotypes and promoting social cohesion within the region. Sixth, Standardization of halal certification and adherence to international halal standards are essential to building credibility and trust among Muslim travellers. ASEAN can work collectively to establish a robust halal certification system, ensuring consistency and transparency across the region. Seventh, Sustainable practices must be at the core of halal tourism in ASEAN. Encouraging eco-friendly initiatives, responsible tourism, and support for local communities will ensure the long-term preservation of natural and cultural heritage. ASEAN can promote sustainable tourism through policy frameworks

and awareness campaigns. Finally, collecting data on the preferences and needs of Muslim travellers is crucial for informed decision-making. ASEAN can collaborate with research institutions and private enterprises to gather insights on the halal tourism market, including travel patterns, spending behaviours, and travel motivations.

### **Our Issues**

In relations with the above issues, Journal of ASEAN studies has covered various issues on tourism and food and its halal certification, which was deliberately discussed by respective authors such as Purnomo et. al. (2023), Musthofa et. al. (2023), and Johan and Plana-Casado (2023). These contributions are respectively providing an overview of the position of halal food, local food in urban tourism, and the components of halal tourism within ASEAN. This has been considered the main attraction of halal tourism in ASEAN countries, with two other articles intensively discuss several recommendations concerning the innovative aspect of halal tourism branding and halal food (Musthofa et. al.; 2023; Johan et. al., 2023). They argue that within the growth of halal tourism in a nation, debates surrounding the emergence of Islamic identity in aspects of halal tourism can potentially obstruct the advancement of cultural tourism commodities. Consequently, the research enhances our understanding of the complex interplay between political economy factors and the evolution of halal tourism from an academic perspective (Musthofa et. al., 2023; Johan et al., 2023).

On the issues of politics and international relations, this volume discussed three different important issues such as on “organized anarchy” of ASEAN by Ashley (2023) and foreign policy of Indonesia on digital diplomacy and Indo-pacific. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, foreign policy and international relations have taken centre stage in shaping the global landscape. For Indonesia, as the world's fourth most populous country and a key player in Southeast Asia, engaging in diplomatic efforts and maintaining strong international relations are crucial. Indonesia's foreign policy is anchored in principles such as sovereignty, independence, and a commitment to peace and cooperation. As a country with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, Indonesia seeks to promote tolerance, mutual respect, and a balanced regional and global order.

Furthermore, the debate on trade agreements on innovation embodies the delicate balance between embracing progress and protecting national interests. As innovation drives the global economy, countries recognize the need for collaboration to advance technologically and economically. However, these agreements must be thoughtfully crafted to address concerns related to intellectual property, national security, and sovereignty. By fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and responsible sharing of knowledge, trade agreements can contribute to a prosperous and interconnected world. The key lies in finding common ground, where nations can build a sustainable framework that promotes innovation while safeguarding their unique identities and interests. As the debate continues, it is crucial for policymakers, businesses, and researchers to engage in constructive dialogue to ensure that trade agreements on innovation benefit all stakeholders, driving progress while preserving sovereignty and ensuring a more inclusive global economy. Smith et. al. (2023) has discussed

at length, especially on the impact of trade agreement such as multilateral free trade agreement on the protection of patents and marks by the individual ASEAN members.

In relation to this strategic trade agreement, the geopolitical issue has become an important that culminates in the growing discourse on Indo-Pacific. Article by Riyanto et. al. (2023) shows how Indonesia's strategic narrative on the Indo-Pacific region is deeply rooted in its geographic location and historical ties to maritime trade. As a bridge between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Indonesia recognizes the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific as a key region for economic growth, security, and geopolitical stability. Indonesia's approach to the Indo-Pacific is centered on the concept of a "Global Maritime Fulcrum," which envisions the country as a hub for maritime cooperation and connectivity. This narrative emphasizes inclusivity, mutual benefit, and sustainable development, seeking to promote economic prosperity and maritime security for all nations in the region.

Indonesia advocates for a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, urging dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes. As a proponent of regional cooperation, Indonesia is actively involved in regional mechanisms such as ASEAN participates in initiatives like the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Furthermore, Indonesia seeks to address transnational challenges, including piracy, human trafficking, and environmental degradation, through collective action and regional partnerships. By embracing a strategic narrative that prioritizes collaboration and constructive engagement, Indonesia contributes to the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

In the digital age, traditional diplomacy has expanded its horizons to include digital diplomacy. Indonesia recognizes the importance of harnessing technology to engage with the global community and advance its foreign policy objectives. The work by Wibowo (2023) shows how digital diplomacy enables Indonesia to project its voice beyond physical borders, engaging with citizens, policymakers, and international audiences in real-time. Through active social media presence, Indonesia's government agencies and diplomats communicate directly with global audiences, fostering dialogue and providing insights into the country's policies and positions on various issues. Digital platforms serve as avenues for promoting Indonesian culture, tourism, and trade, enhancing Indonesia's soft power and global influence. Moreover, Indonesia deploys digital diplomacy to address contemporary challenges such as countering misinformation and promoting fact-based information. By participating in online dialogues and international fora, Indonesia contributes to shaping global narratives, reinforcing its role as a responsible and respected member of the international community.

This edition also includes topics that related to the role of non-state society in regional integration. The article by Sukamdani (2023) discusses how family businesses have long been the backbone of economies in the ASEAN region, contributing significantly to GDP and providing employment opportunities. In recent times, these family-owned enterprises have taken on an increasingly critical role in ensuring food security for the region. With a growing population, changing dietary preferences, and environmental challenges, family businesses play a vital part in fostering sustainable agriculture and bolstering food security in ASEAN.

In this case, Sukamdani (2023) has provided insight for professionals who work in the sector to gain insight into how family businesses work to maintain their entrepreneurial spirit. Another manuscript by Setijaningrum et. al. (2023) reveals that non-monetary incentives such as supportive and amicable workplace environments, including the possibility of career advancements and adequate accommodations, as well as productive and family-oriented communities, act as important motivators for Indonesian migrant workers to go back to host countries. Furthermore, the authors highlight the widening topography of migration studies by which it provides a broader picture in painting the “human” rationality behind circular migration in Global South.

This edition provides significant debates on the cultural, economic, and political aspects of the Southeast Asia region, not only from the traditional issues of regionalism such as diplomacy and foreign policy aspects of Indo-Pacific, but also contemporary approaches. Looking at ASEAN regionalism through tourism and food culture aspects have given different perspectives on how ASEAN’s commitment to integration can be expanded and narrated without losing its local identity components. In that sense, ASEAN integration in the future shall build upon better understanding of locality, national needs, and regional understanding.

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